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## **THE VARIETY OF Vance and Avon Faience: PART I, THE VANCE FAIENCE COMPANY**

**BY JAMES L. MURPHY**

Seldom has there been a more disparate pair of ceramic Siamese twins than the Vance and Avon Faience companies of tiny Tiltonsville, Ohio, an Ohio River town about eight miles north of Wheeling, West Virginia. Sigafoose puts it more bluntly, if perhaps a little too bluntly: “Most authors of the last 30 years continue to mistakenly refer to the Avon Faience Company as Vance/Avon Faience [although these] were two completely different organizations with different management, different designers and artists, and very different products that are signed with different marks.”<sup>1</sup>



*Owl candlestick, “Good Evening Old Friend, “with embossed bat, man-in-the moon, and stars. 5 ¼ inches high, base impressed with block letter “F”.*

In terms of product, the work produced by the Vance pottery appears largely to have been the work of a single designer and modeler, Rudolph Lorber (1872-1952), better known for his later work at Zanesville's Weller Pottery, while the product of the Avon company was the result of diverse designers and decorators such as William P. Jervis (1851-1925), Frederick H. Rhead (1880-1942), and Albert L. Cusick (1881-1946). Both endeavors were short-lived, production by the Vance Faience Co. much the shorter, and Vance Faience pottery has been largely dismissed by collectors and historians alike, some pieces even described a bit harshly as being “bloated, molded wares.”<sup>2</sup>



*Two examples of Vance Faience's hound-handled pitcher, made from old Daniel Greatbach molds. The caramel-glazed example is impressed "VANCE F. CO/3" and measures 12 inches high. (Three different sizes were made). The blue and white "Delft" example courtesy of Dr. David C Schwartz.*

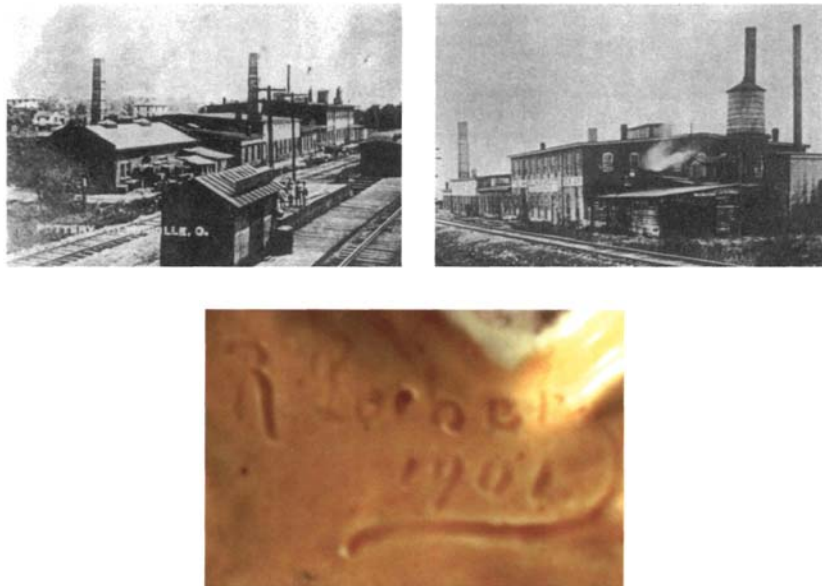
J. Nelson Vance, for whom the pottery was named, was a Wheeling industrialist who made most of his money in the iron and steel industry, eventually branching into the manufacturing of shoes and, in 1900, art pottery. He and another Wheeling iron and steel industrialist, John D. Culbertson, joined with an experienced potter, Charles W. Franzheim, who had founded the Wheeling Pottery Co. in 1879, serving as president and general manager. Franzheim was also president of the Warwick Pottery Co. from 1889 to 1893, likewise of the Riverside Pottery Co. beginning in 1899.<sup>3</sup>

The Tiltonsville pottery had a fairly long but lack-luster pedigree, dating back to 1881 when a cooperative company was organized to produce yellow and Rockingham ware, although operation of the two-kiln Ohio Valley Cooperative Pottery did not actually begin until early 1884. A line of novelties was added but by 1892 the Tiltonsville Pottery Co., as it was then known, had been leased by the Western Sanitary Co., which failed after a disastrous fire in 1893, remaining idle and passing through several hands, including those of New York attorney John Randolph Dos Passos (father of the famous American writer), until purchased by the Vance Faience Co., November 19, 1900.<sup>4</sup>



**ABOVE:** Later view of Rudolph Lorber at the Weller Pottery, courtesy of Richard Lorber. Note the Woodcraft piece with owl on the right wall. **BELOW:** Two views of the (then) Avon Faience Co. plant ca. 1907, courtesy of Robert

*H. Richardson.*



**ABOVE:** "R. Lorber 1901" signature as found on several Vance Faience pieces. **BELOW:** Charles W. Franzheim examining a toilet set probably made by Wheeling Pottery. Courtesy of American Ceramic Society Bulletin.



Manager of the new concern was Charles E. Jackson (1874-1935), who had worked at Wheeling's Riverside Pottery and taken course work at Ohio State University's ceramics department. He was responsible for mixing of the clay bodies and the glazes, mostly air-brushed shades of brown, tan, yellow and olive green. Jackson later worked at the Onondaga Pottery, Syracuse, New York, and managed Warwick China for nearly 25 years, until his death in 1935.<sup>5</sup>

Modeler for Vance Faience Co. was Rudolph Lorber, born in Vienna, Austria in 1872, and modeler for Thomas Forester and Son, a Longton, Staffordshire pottery first known for its majolica but by the late 1890s a manufacturer of art ware. Although Lorber is listed in the 1901 census of Great Britain as living at 97 Russell Street in Longton, it appears that he emigrated to

the United States sometime in 1900, as a note in *China, Glass and Lamps* (November 2, 1901) states that he had been in America only about five months. The article also noted that the pottery, now a three-kiln operation, would have its samples on the road in early November.

Several of Lorber's pieces are both signed and dated 1901. These include a strawberry platter replete with molded strawberries, snakes, and a lizard. Another signed Lorber piece, also dated 1901, is an intricately fluted, basket-like flower holder. Several Vance shapes suggest a strong English influence, including a cat figurai pitcher, the grotesque creamer, the larger fluted planter with crane, and the sunflower jardinière and pedestal (also signed by Lorber). The latter, "magnificently embossed and shaded from Nile green to dark olive green all over" was still available from the Wheeling Pottery in 1906, when they had "a few dozen to close out at bargain prices." That would be \$2.00 each, freight paid.<sup>6</sup> An exuberant note in *China, Glass and Lamps* (May 10, 1902) describes Vance Faience's "main line" as "a dull finished vitrified china in seven different shades," with demand for the blue and green so great that "it is taxing the firm to its utmost to meet the demand. The blue and the green are both of a dark, rich shade and attract attention wherever exhibited." This may refer to the blue green glaze used on the sunflower jardinière.



1. A large Vance Faience planter, 11 inches high, base impressed with "VANCE F. CO., No. 123" and block letter "M". 2. Art deco planter or letter holder, 5 ½ inches high, no mark. 3. Grotesque pitcher, 5 ½ inches high, base with impressed block letter "L"



One Vance Faience shape definitely not created by Lorber was the firm's reproduction of the Daniel Greatbach hound-handled pitcher, originally designed by Greatbach for the U.S. Pottery Co. of Bennington, Vermont in the 1850s. When Greatbach left Bennington, he may have taken his molds with him, first to South Carolina and then to Peoria, Illinois, where he reportedly sold them to the American Pottery Co.<sup>7</sup> It is also possible that when the Bennington pottery closed in 1859, the proprietors, Fenton and Clark, still had the molds and took them with them to Peoria. In any case, Greatbach's molds eventually found their way to the Vance Faience Co., where they were used for reproductions of Greatbach's famous hound-handled pitcher. This and the mermaid vase attributed to Lorber appear to have been the most popular pieces made by Vance Faience. While the latter was made only in the usual blended, air-brushed brown to green glaze, the hound-handled pitcher is found in matt green, pink, and a spectacular blue and white "Delft" glaze.<sup>8</sup>

It is uncertain precisely when and why Lorber left the Vance Faience Co. Possibly the subdued glazes of Vance's product did not appeal sufficiently to the public, though that would not be the fault of the modeler. In any case, there may have been more personal reasons: while Lorber's whereabouts between the time he left Vance Faience and began working at Weller have been something of a mystery, it appears that he returned to England where he married Maud Sadler, the newlyweds sailing to America in late August, 1903.<sup>9</sup>



4. Small floor vase or planter, 13 ½ inches high, base with impressed block letter "L". 5. Grotesque cat pitcher, 10 inches high, base marked with block letter "M". 6. Sunflower jardinière and pedestal, 30 inches high. Jardinière signed "R. Lorber", with script "Vance Faience Co./Tiltsville, Ohio" impressed on base of jardinière. Pedestal not marked.

Lorber was replaced by William P. Jervis, who had become manager of the pottery by September, 1902, when the name was changed to the Avon Faience Co. If Frederick H. Rhead's memory is correct, Jervis must have been in charge by June, 1902, when Rhead states that he immigrated to the U.S. to manage the Avon Faience pottery.<sup>10</sup> It is generally assumed that he came at the behest of Jervis, who was a friend of the Rhead family while in England.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, Jervis immigrated to the United States around 1892, when Frederick H. Rhead was a boy of only 11 years. While it is possible that Jervis remained in touch with the Rhead family, it seems equally likely that Lorber knew Rhead when they both worked at Thomas Forester & Sons and that he suggested the move to Tiltonsville.

Vance molds, presumably created by Lorber, continued to be used by the later Avon Faience Co. but with remarkably different decoration, characterized by the slip trailing and tube lining introduced by Jervis and Rhead. One last trace of Lorber's influence may be the wavy lines incorporated in the Avon W Pts Co and other Avon marks, for while they may be taken to represent the waters of the Ohio River, a similar element is incorporated in a number of Lorber's shapes, notably the mermaid and heron vases, the sunflower jardinière, and even the grotesque pitcher.

When the newly-wed Lorber returned to the United States in 1903, it was not to Tiltonsville but to Zanesville, where he gained considerable fame as a designer for Weller, and his early work at Vance Faience remains largely but unfairly forgotten.



*Daffodil jug, with hand-painted flowers and leaves (obscured by olive-brown overglaze). Base impressed "VANCE F. CO. Slightly smaller molds were later used by Avon Faience, hand-painted flowers against a plain white background.*

#### **(Endnotes)**

- 1 Sigafoose, Dick. *American Art Pottery: A Collection of Pottery Tiles, and memorabilia 1880-1950*. Collector Books, Paducah, KY, 1998, p. 42.
- 2 Dale, Sharon. *Frederick Hurten Rhead: An English Potter in America*. Erie, PA: Erie Art Museum, 1986, p. 24. Although the assessment seems to be attributed to Paul Evans, Dale (pers. comm.) indicates that she was referring particularly to Lorber's mermaid vase.
- 3 Cranmer, Gibson Lamb. *History of Wheeling City and Ohio County, West Virginia, and Representative Citizens*. Chicago: Biographical Publishing Co., 1902, p. 363.
- 4 Richardson, Robert H. *A Time and Place in Ohio: A Chronological Account of Certain Historical and Genealogical Miscellany in Eastern Ohio*. Smithtown, NY, Exposition Press, 1983, p. 107. Doyle, Joseph B. *The History of Steubenville and Jefferson County Ohio*. Chicago, IL, Richmond-Arnold, 1910.

- 5 China, Glass and Lamps, May 10, 1902; Rader, John R. *Warwick China: The Company Built by People*. At-glen, PA, Schiffer, 2000, p. 18; "Necrology," *American Ceramic Society Bulletin* 14 (1935), p. 185.
- 6 The Wheeling Potteries Co. Catalogue No. 31, 1906.
- 7 Cox, Warren E. *The Book of Pottery and Porcelain*. Crown Publishers, New York, 1970, p. 995. See also: Jervis, W. P., "Greatback's Hound Handle Pitcher, *Old China* 2(5): 95-97. I am grateful to Charles S. Schmidt for calling this reference to my attention.
- 8 Evans, *Art Pottery of the United States*. New York, NY: Feingold and Lewis, 1987, p. 304. Jervis, op. cit., p. 97, in February, 1903, indicates that Vance Faience "will issue a limited number" of these, (*italics added*)
- 9 Ellis Island Foundation, Inc. Ellis Island Passenger Lists. Manifest for Ship Arabic, arrived August 30, 1903. Manifest ([http://www.ellislandrecords.org/genealogy/ellis\\_island.asp](http://www.ellislandrecords.org/genealogy/ellis_island.asp)). Listed as Rudolph and Maud Lorbee.
- 10 Rhead, unpublished autobiographical ms., cited in Dale, p. 24.
- 11 Bumpus, Bernard. *Collecting Rhead Pottery: Charlotte, Frederick, Frederick Hurten*. London, Francis Joseph, 1999, p. 15.

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